



BRIEFING MEMO

DATE: September 13, 2013
TO: Parks Legacy Citizens Advisory Committee
FROM: Joel Harte, Research Aide
SUBJECT: Survey and Levy Information Briefing

This memo summarizes the results of three polls relating to increased funding for parks and recreation through a ballot measure. It also includes relevant information on three recent Seattle levies regarding the size of a potential funding measure, and the amount of potential support from voters.

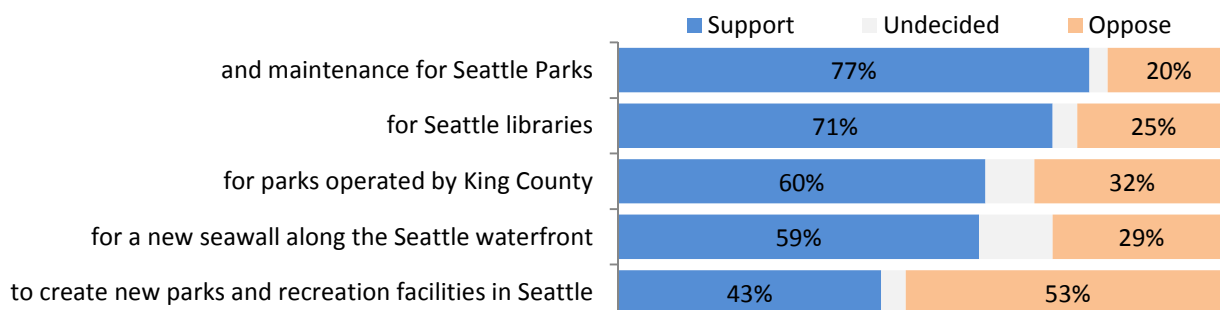
Funding Priorities

Respondents to Seattle Parks Foundation and King County Parks surveys were more supportive of operations and maintenance funding than of capital funding.

Seattle Parks Foundation survey: The Seattle Parks Foundation contracted EMC Research to conduct a telephone survey of 400 registered voters in the City of Seattle from March 18-21, 2011. EMC Research used trained, professional interviewers. The results have a margin of error of ± 4.9 points at the 95% confidence interval.

Responding voters were much more likely to support funding for operations and maintenance than to support new park and facility development.

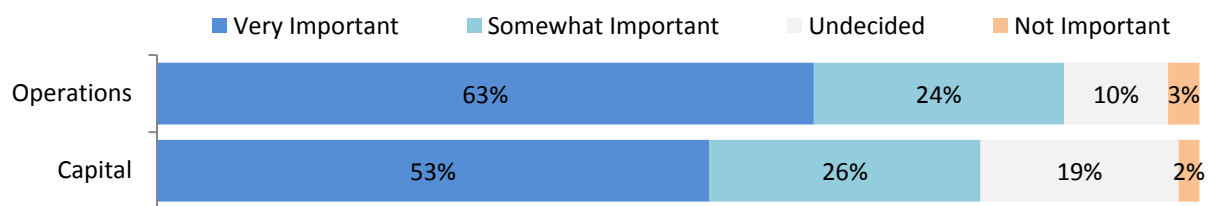
Figure 1: Would you support or oppose a tax measure to provide funding... (Seattle Parks Foundation survey)



King County Parks survey: King County Parks’ Levy Task Force contracted EMC Research to survey 400 King County residents from August 20-22, 2012, prior to the passage of the Parks, Trails, and Open Space Replacement Levy in 2013. EMC Research used random digit dialing, and trained, professional interviewers. The results have a margin of error of ± 4.9 points at the 95% confidence interval.

More King County respondents reported that operational funding was important than reported capital funding was important (86% to 75%). Respondents to the King County survey from Seattle were more supportive of operational funding than respondents from the rest of King County, but not by an appreciable amount (87% to 85%).

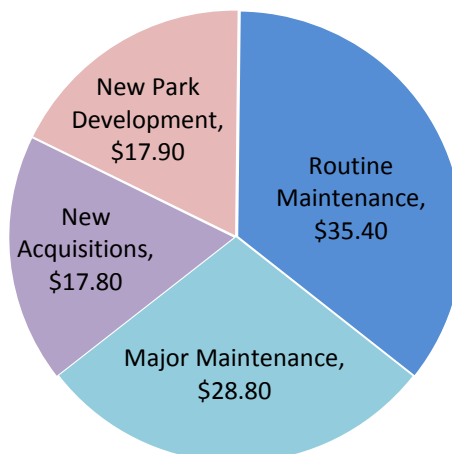
Figure 2: Important of Operations vs. Capital (King County Survey—Seattle Only)



Seattle Parks and Recreation survey: In September 2012, Seattle Parks and Recreation commissioned a statistically valid telephone survey of a 400-person sample of Seattle residents—age 18 and older—that matched Seattle’s demographics.

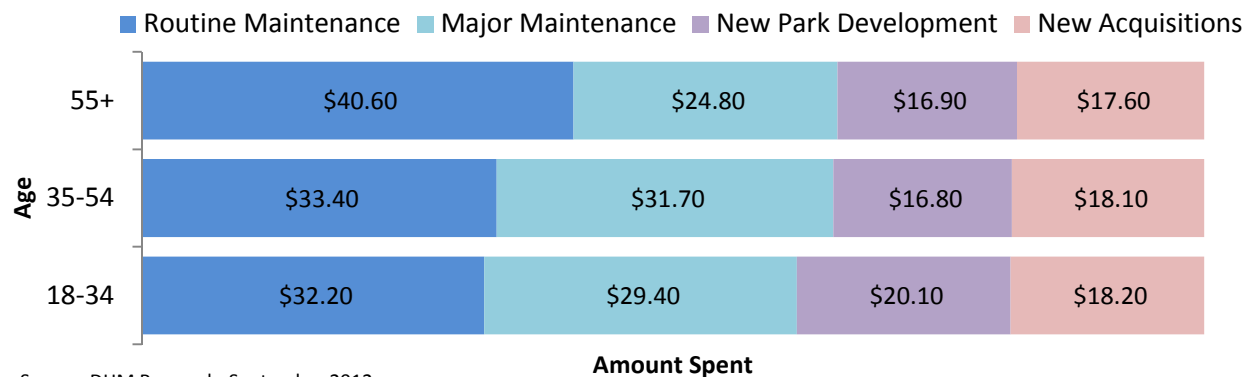
The survey asked its 400 respondents to allocate \$100 across four Parks-related categories: new acquisitions, new park development, routine maintenance, and major maintenance. Combined, routine maintenance and major maintenance received nearly 2/3 of the total allocation, or \$64.20. Routine maintenance was assigned the highest priority. Respondents older than 55 funded routine maintenance at a high level, spending \$40.60, but funded major maintenance at a slightly lower level, allotting \$24.80.

Figure 3: Service Priorities (Seattle Parks survey)



Source: DHM Research, September 2012

Figure 4: Service Priorities by Age (Seattle Parks survey)



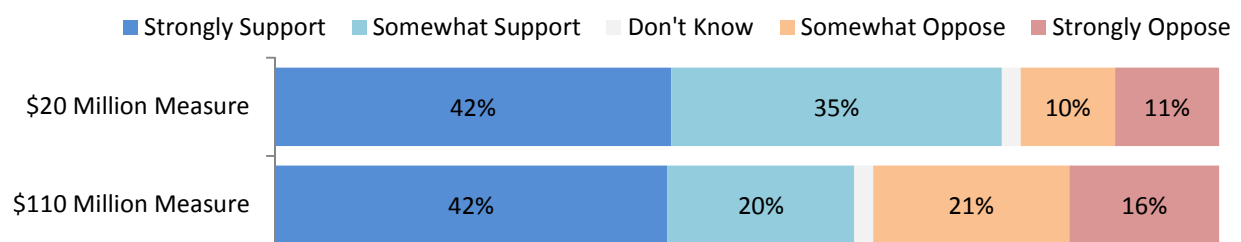
Size of Funding Measure

There seems to be more overall support for funding for operations and maintenance than for capital, but how much support? There are signs that voters would support a relatively large operations and maintenance funding package.

Seattle Parks Foundation survey: A majority of respondents supported a (hypothetical) \$20 million measure and a \$110 million measure, each of which would have six-year terms. The \$20 million measure, which was said to fund only basic operations, was estimated to cost the average homeowner \$67 per year. The \$110 million measure, which would fund basic operations and address one-third of the major maintenance backlog, was estimated to cost the average homeowner about \$117 per year. 77% of respondents, in total, supported a \$20 million measure—42% were somewhat supportive, and 35% were strongly supportive. Fewer, but still a majority, supported the \$110 million measure—61% in total, with 42% somewhat supportive and 20% strongly supportive. 37%, however, opposed the larger measure.

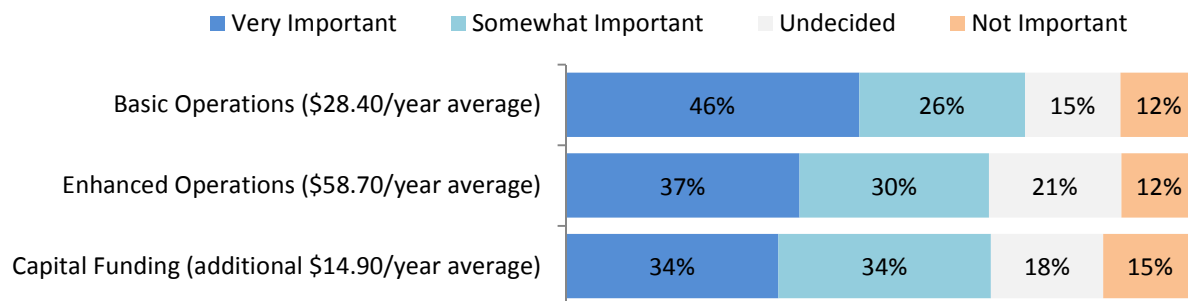
The percent of those that *strongly* supported a measure did not change with its size. However, the number of those that *somewhat* supported it decreased by 15%. It appears that the attitudes of those who strongly support a measure are not terribly affected by its size, but those who are more ambivalent in general are much more opposed to a larger funding measure.

Figure 5: Support for \$20 and \$110 million funding measures (Seattle Parks Foundation survey)



King County Parks survey: This survey asked respondents to rank the importance of both an enhanced operations package and a basic operations package, and then to rank the importance of an additional capital funding package on top of the operations package. 72% said a basic operations package, costing homeowners an average of \$28.40 per year, was important. 46% said it was “very important”, and 26% said it was “somewhat important”. 67% of respondents said an enhanced operations package, costing homeowners an average of \$58.70 per year, was important, with 37% of respondents saying it was “very important” and 30% saying it was “somewhat important”. 68% of respondents said the additional capital funding package (understood to be in addition to either operations package, and costing homeowners an average of \$14.90 per year) was important, and were evenly split between “very” and “somewhat” important.

Figure 6: Support for funding measures (King County Parks survey)



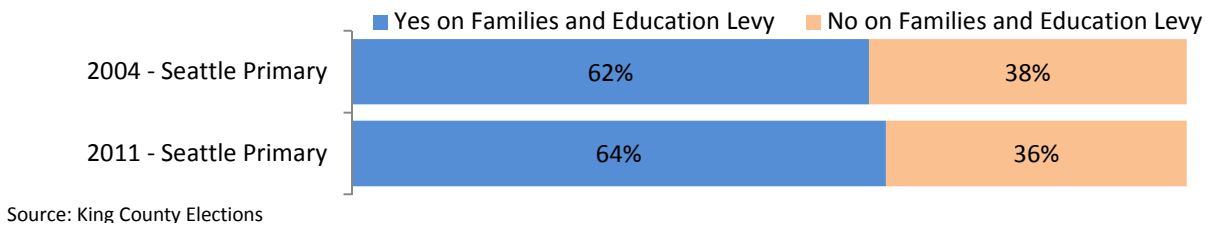
Seattle Parks and Recreation survey: Parks’ survey did not delve into the size of a funding measure.

Families and Education Levy: The Families and Education Levy Committee recommended three funding levels for their 2011 seven-year levy. The Committee endorsed the highest level, as did the Mayor and City Council.

- Low: \$139,746,475
- Medium: \$182,009,282
- High: \$234,109,403

The previous Families and Education Levy, which was in effect from 2004-2011, collected \$118,598,000 in total revenue. The current Families and Education Levy will bring in \$231,560,000 over seven years—a 95% increase from the previous levy. This translates to a levy rate of \$0.27 per \$1,000 of assessed real estate value. The Committee did not perform any polling to arrive at the levy rate, but, in fact, the proportion of voters who supported the Families and Education Levy increased from 2004 to 2011—from 62% in 2004 to 64% in 2011.

Figure 7: Families and Education Levy election results, 2004 and 2011



Seawall Levy: Seattle voters approved a 30-year, \$290 million seawall replacement levy in the November 6, 2012 general election. As reported at the time, the property tax would amount to roughly \$59 for a \$360,000 home. Voters passed the measure with 77% support.

Library Levy: In 2012, Seattle voters approved the Library Levy increase. The measure would raise \$123 million over seven years to fund increased library hours and other improvements. The library estimated the measure would cost the median homeowner \$52 per year in taxes. Voters passed the measure with 62% support.

Discussion

The King County and Seattle Parks Foundation surveys took samples from different populations at different times, and covered different issues. Therefore, a direct comparison between on specific questions is not possible. However, some broad conclusions can be drawn. Local voters and residents seem to prefer, on paper, operations and maintenance over capital. They also supported the idea of new tax measures to support parks and recreation, to varying degrees.

Levy passage information provides a detailed look of how Seattle voters actually vote. The three recent levy measures show that Seattle voters are willing to fund enhancements to operations, maintenance, and renovations through property tax levies. All three measures passed with over 60% of the vote.

Funding priorities: Respondents to both King County Parks and Seattle Parks Foundation surveys were more inclined to support additional funding for operations than for capital. The difference in the Seattle Parks Foundation survey was notable—77% support for operations and maintenance, compared to 43% for capital—showing, perhaps, that voters feel that Seattle has an adequate number of parks and facilities despite gaps in open space. The slightly tighter numbers between operations and capital found in the King County Parks survey may be attributable to the unique role King County Parks plays as a recreation provider, large-scale land owner, and cache of conserved natural areas, forests, and lakes. This role could indicate to survey respondents that capital funding is a more feasible and attractive option at the county level than for Seattle itself. The Seattle Parks Foundation results closely match the results from Seattle Parks and Recreation’s 2012 survey. Respondents spent almost 2/3 of their allocation on routine and major maintenance, and about 36% on new acquisition and new development.

Size of funding measure: In both surveys, support decreased as the size of the funding package increased. Neither survey, however, identified a funding amount that a majority of respondents were not in favor of. According to the Seattle Parks Foundation survey, 61% would be willing to pay, on average, \$117 more per year for enhanced operations and maintenance. 67% of King County survey respondents reported they would be willing to pay, on average, \$58.70 per year to fund enhanced operations, with 68% willing to pay an additional \$14.90 per year for capital. Because neither survey identified an amount that a majority of respondents wouldn't support, it is difficult to extract the true "limit" on cost that Seattle voters will support. However, the Families and Education Levy Committee in 2011 decided to increase the size of their levy by 95%, and also received a larger share of the vote when the measure was on the ballot.